

California Water Conditions Synopsis for February 2003

February continued the pattern experienced last season with a good start to the water year fading as the season progressed. Precipitation in northern and central California was only about one half of normal during February. Snowpack water content increased only slightly during the month and has fallen below average in nearly all basins. Due to the dry weather since January, it is likely that river runoff will be below average this water year.

Precipitation during February was about 70 percent of average statewide due to very wet conditions in the South Coast and Colorado Desert regions. The cumulative statewide precipitation from October 1 to February 28 was 100 percent of average compared to 90 percent last year.

Snowpack water content increased less than 10 percent during February, much less than normal. The statewide snowpack was 80% of average on March 1, with a bias toward the North Coast & Lahontan regions. The accumulation has reached 70 percent of the April 1 average (the normal date of maximum accumulation).

Runoff during February was half of average, dropping cumulative runoff for the water year to 100 percent of average, still slightly more than last year. Runoff has been highest in the North Coast region. There was no high water during the month. The chance that water year runoff will exceed average has dropped to under 25% in the Sacramento region, 10% in the San Joaquin region and about 15% for the Tulare region.

Forecasts of April through July runoff, assuming normal weather for the remainder of the season, have dropped further below average at 75 percent overall. Water year forecasts, which include the higher early winter flows, are 85 percent of average. The runoff forecasts are highest in northern basins. As of March 1, the forecasted Sacramento River Index (SRI) was 85 percent of average, the Sacramento Valley Index (40-30-30 SVI) year type was 'below normal', and the San Joaquin Valley Index (60-20-20 SJI) year type was 'dry'.

Reservoir storage increased at less than an average pace during February. Overall storage was just under 100 percent of average on March 1, nearly the same as last year. Storage in most major California reservoirs remains well below winter flood control limits. On the Colorado River, storage in Lake Mead and Lake Powell is at a thirty year low.